



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Accessing a Transitional House

Supplemental to Policies: N/A

Transitional Houses are community-based locations where a custodial child awaiting placement in a foster home or facility may, for a short period of time, wait in a home-like setting, while still under the direct supervision of Department staff. Transitional Houses in regions may also be used as an alternative location to conduct supervised visitation, child and family team meetings (CFTMs), and to wait with noncustodial children in limited circumstances. Each region will have a designated point of contact for any Transitional House located within the region.

Applicability

This protocol is applicable to all DCS Case Managers, Team Leaders, Team Coordinators, and Regional Administrators or Directors, including Family Services, Child Protective Services, and Juvenile Justice. For the purposes of this Protocol, these individuals will be collectively referred to as "DCS Worker."

NOTE: Some Transitional Houses may have their own protocols or procedures that must be followed prior to accessing the property. The DCS Worker shall ensure they are familiar with the local protocols, if any, and will comply with those protocols in addition to these requirements.

Accessing a Transitional House for Custodial Child Awaiting Placement

When a custodial child does not have a placement, DCS Workers may be able to access a Transitional House to wait with the child while placement is located.

1. Prior to taking a child to a Transitional House, the DCS Worker will contact the regionally identified point of contact for the Department to determine if a Transitional House is available and appropriate for the child. The regionally identified Department staff will contact the Transitional House to determine if the Transitional House has space and will accept the child, if required by the Transitional House.

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2. When deciding whether a Transitional House is the appropriate setting for the child, an assessment of each child's needs will be considered, to determine if a space can be safely shared with others, and the experience level, gender, and number of DCS Workers who will be providing supervision. The assessment should include, but is not limited to, information about the child's mental health history; history of self-harm; medical needs; sexually reactive or sexually abusive behaviors; aggressive behaviors or behaviors that pose a danger to self or others; runaway history; substance use; pending or adjudicated delinquent charges; and recent suicidal ideations or attempts. While these behaviors may not prohibit the use of a Transitional House, the DCS Worker shall develop a safety plan prior to using a Transitional House for the child.
3. If it is determined by the regionally identified Department staff that a Transitional House will be used while the child is awaiting placement, a DCS Worker has the responsibility to transport the child to and from the Transitional House. Transportation of children to and from a Transitional House will follow DCS Policy [31.15, Guidelines for Transportation of Child/Youth By Regional Employees](#).
4. Prior to transporting a child to a Transitional House, the DCS Worker ensures that any personal items or belongings that will accompany the child to the Transitional House are appropriate and do not pose a health or safety concern to the child or others that may be present at the Transitional House. See DCS Policy [31.4, Search Procedures](#). Subsequent searches may be conducted when necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and others.
5. A child daily log form, [CS-4227, Child Daily Log for Transitional Houses](#), will accompany each child taken to a transitional house. Any safety plan that was created will also accompany the Child Daily Log for Transitional Houses. The DCS Worker transporting the child to the Transitional House ensures that the log is completed and is provided to any subsequent DCS Worker that may be sitting with the child, along with a verbal update about the status of the child and any pertinent information (e.g. when the child last ate; any medication distributed; any information learned in the last shift, etc.). At the beginning of each DCS Worker's shift at a Transitional House, the DCS Worker will also assess the safety of the location, including checking windows and doors to ensure the structure is secure; removing any sharp objects or other hazards; and securing items that could be damaged.

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6. If a child waiting at a Transitional House is prescribed medication, the DCS Worker complies with [Protocol for DCS Case Managers to Distribute or Observe Self-Administration of Medication for Custodial Youth](#) and DCS Policy [20.15, Medication Administration, Storage, and Disposal](#). Medication is secured in a locked location.
7. Technology access for the child should be limited and only allowed when the DCS Worker can directly supervise the screen of the device. Children should not be allowed to access cell phones while in the Transitional House unless it is for the purpose of conducting a supervised phone call visitation with the parent(s). The child and family team can assess the appropriateness of a child's access to a cell phone once the child is permanently placed.
8. Prior to using a Transitional House, the DCS Worker/Department will ensure that any child waiting at the Transitional House has access to following minimum amenities:
 - ◆ Restroom/Toilet
 - ◆ Shower/bathing facilities
 - ◆ Adequate sleeping space
 - ◆ Linens (e.g., towels, bedding, pillows, etc.)
 - ◆ Personal care items/toiletries
 - ◆ Regular meals and snacks

9. SUPERVISION

- ◆ While a child is at a Transitional House, DCS maintains the responsibility of providing continuous supervision of the child. The DCS Worker or DCS contracted provider (e.g. a sitter service) will ensure twenty-four (24) hour a day supervision whenever a child is present at a Transitional House. While Transitional Houses may have approved volunteers at the location to assist DCS Workers, supervision still remains DCS' responsibility.
- ◆ Children will be directly supervised in a manner that allows the DCS Worker to see and hear the child at all times. Bedroom doors should not be closed.
- ◆ While the DCS Worker may be able to complete some other work while supervising a child, the DCS Worker must still be able to view and hear the child. The DCS Worker shall not discuss confidential information in front of a child or any volunteers at the

Transitional House. Any phone calls taken while supervising children should not discuss confidential information and should be as brief as possible to ensure appropriate supervision of the child. The DCS Worker will not conduct CFTMs while supervising children unless it is a CFTM for the child being supervised.

- ◆ Two DCS Workers will be present and providing supervision in the Transitional House when children are present. However, if the individualized circumstances of the child warrant reduced supervision, a waiver of this requirement may be granted by the Regional Administrator/CPS Director/JJ Director to allow only one DCS Worker to be present and providing supervision. A waiver shall not be used because of limited staff availability, but only if the child can be safely supervised by one DCS Worker. When making this determination, the Regional Administrator may also consider the availability of contracted sitters, approved volunteers, etc. to provide support to the DCS Worker. Under no circumstances shall the ratio of children to DCS staff exceed 3:1. Additional DCS Workers may also need to be present based upon the needs of the child.
 - ◆ DCS workers should alternate in shifts to provide supervision and care of children in a Transitional House. A DCS worker's shift of direct supervision of children in a Transitional House should not exceed six (6) consecutive hours and/or twelve (12) total hours within a twenty-four (24) hour period. DCS Workers providing supervision of children should be allotted a thirty (30) minute break if working a shift for six (6) consecutive hours which should be alternated between co-supervisors.
 - ◆ Children should be provided the ability to use the restroom and shower with privacy. Children must be accompanied to the entry of the restroom and the DCS worker should remain within visual distance of the restroom entrance while it is in use. Children may not be accompanied by other children inside the restroom/showing area.
10. Once placement has been located, the DCS Worker transports the child from the Transitional House to the child's placement according to DCS Policy [31.15, Guidelines for Transportation of Child/Youth By Regional Employees](#).
 11. Prior to leaving the Transitional House, the DCS Worker ensures that the Transitional House is left in a good condition (e.g. toys picked up and put away; dishes washed; garbage removed; etc.). The DCS Worker also contacts the regionally identified

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Department staff or Transitional House staff to advise that they are leaving the Transitional House.

12. In the event an emergency arises while the DCS Worker and a child are at a Transitional House, the DCS Worker will follow regular regional procedures (e.g. use of the regional on-call protocol in the event of a child behavior issue; contacting 911 or law enforcement if needed; etc.).
13. When a child is taken to a Transitional House before midnight and remains overnight, regional placement staff enters the child's placement in TFACTS as 'in office.' After entering the placement, regional placement staff enters a case recording that documents the specific location and name of the Transitional House, as well as the date the child was present at the Transitional House. This is documented for each day a child is located at a Transitional House. Additionally, the designated regional DCS worker ensures that the Youth in Office or Transitional House Overnight data collection spreadsheet is updated each day.

Accessing a Transitional House for Other Purposes

1. The primary purpose of a Transitional House is to provide a safe and appropriate place for a child to wait until placement is found. However, some Transitional Houses may allow access to the Transitional House for reasons beyond a temporary waiting place for custodial children awaiting placement. Examples include, but are not limited to, a place for supervised visitation for custodial or noncustodial cases; a place for CFTMs for custodial and noncustodial cases; and a place for noncustodial children while expedited placement referrals are being completed or a parent/custodian is being located to pick up the child.
2. Each region will have a designated point of contact for any Transitional House located within the region and will be responsible for knowing whether the Transitional House is willing to allow the location to be used for any purpose other than waiting for placement of a custodial child. Prior to accessing the Transitional House for these purposes, the DCS Worker confirms with the designated regional point of contact that the Transitional House is available and willing to allow the activity to occur.
3. If the Transitional House is used to conduct supervised visitation or a CFTM, the DCS Worker ensures all applicable DCS Policy is followed.

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4. Prior to a DCS Worker transporting any noncustodial child to a Transitional House, the DCS Worker obtains parent's consent to transport the child and consent to wait with the child at the Transitional House. This is documented by obtaining the parent's signature on CS-0827, Non-Custodial Consent for Transportation and notating the purpose of waiting at the Transitional House on the form.
5. Prior to leaving the Transitional House, the DCS Worker ensures that the Transitional House is left in a good condition (e.g. toys picked up and put away; dishes washed; garbage removed; etc.). The DCS Worker also contacts the regionally identified Department staff or Transitional House staff to advise that they are leaving the Transitional House.
6. After using the Transitional House for a purpose other than waiting with a custodial child, the DCS Worker enters a case recording documenting the use of the Transitional House and the purpose of the use in the child's case in TFACTS.